

ELKRIDGE PATCH

Elkridge Workshop on Train-Truck Facility Draws Crowd Seeking Answers

On Wednesday night, more than 200 Elkridge citizens asked questions about the freight transfer station that CSX wants to build in central Maryland.

By Elizabeth Janney | April 28, 2011

Residents wore red to signal their opposition to the rail facility currently being considered in Elkridge. Many asked their questions at the April 27 public workshop on comment cards provided.

After CSX failed to disclose nearly \$1 million in property purchases on Hanover and Race Roads, greater Elkridge residents said they need to be convinced the search for a freight transfer facility will be open and above board.

"There is a lot of information that has not been forthcoming," said Gail Sigel at the April 27 public workshop in Elkridge about the proposed intermodal facility.

The site at Hanover and Race Roads is one of four locations the state and CSX are considering for the project, which would enable trains and trucks to swap containers of freight.

Sigel attended all three workshops in the counties where the proposed sites for the project are located; last week, there was one in Prince George's County and another in Anne Arundel. "There are three or four times as many people here tonight," she said of the workshop in Elkridge.

According to Jack Cahalan, spokesman for Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), there were 135 people at the workshop in Beltsville, 40 people at the workshop in Hanover and more than 200 at the workshop in Elkridge.

Although the workshops were filled with poster boards and representatives from MDOT and CSX, Sigel said that the information provided left something to be desired. "Their maps haven't even been updated," she said, explaining that the displays showing the four proposed sites didn't reflect developments made in the last five years.

Because of what they view as a lack of accurate information from officials, Elkridge residents say they are taking action. "It's more of us as a community, the Greater Elkridge Community Association and the community in general, working to uncover more and more facts," said Sigel. "And we have a committee working on that specifically."

Others echoed Sigel's sentiment that the process working with MDOT and CSX has not been transparent.

"I believe that there is an intentional effort on the part of MDOT [Maryland Department of Transportation] and CSX to hide information from the general public," said Mike, a Hanover Crossing resident who asked that his last name not be used. "It's all smoke and mirrors."

His and Sigel's neighborhoods are two of several that would be affected should Hanover be selected for the facility. There are more than 350 homes within a quarter mile of the possible site at Hanover and Race Roads, according to a survey from County Councilwoman Courtney Watson, who said at the April 21 Greater Elkridge Community Association that from an environmental and community standpoint, the site does not make sense.

In researching the public-private partnership between MDOT and CSX, Mike found that filings about the intermodal project have been withheld from public consumption. As a result, he filed a request through the Freedom of Information Act on Monday to view all communications about the intermodal rail project from the past three years.

"It looks like they are hiding something," said his wife, who asked not to be identified.

On Wednesday evening, the couple brought a stack of questions for MDOT and CSX during the workshop at the Elkridge Landing Middle School gymnasium.

The open house-format workshop included poster board displays with background information and visuals of "how the facility could fit within the footprint of the four sites," said Cahalan. "This informal setting allows for a give-and-take discussion."

Mike disagreed, calling it "CSX propaganda" at the April 20 workshop in Beltsville.

Frank Boston, a CSX lobbyist at the Elkridge workshop on April 27, said he was there "to learn about the people I represent" (CSX). Boston said he had not attended the other two workshops.

To help make their feelings known, Elkridge residents decorated the neighborhood near Elkridge Landing Middle School with signs that read "Stop Intermodal Now."

In the days leading up to the workshop, "Stop Intermodal Now" signs cropped up along Route 1, Montgomery Road and Old Washington Road, among other locations. To match the red and white signs, residents who opposed the idea of the facility in Hanover wore red to the workshop.

As workshop attendees approached the entrance to Elkridge Landing Middle School from Montgomery Road, they were greeted by sign after sign with the "Stop Intermodal Now" message, up to the front door, behind which MDOT staffers were checking people in.

"It doesn't surprise me," said Cahalan of the signs. "What we would hope is that they continue. This isn't duck-and-run from the community. It's an important part of the process."